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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002540

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ECON PREL IS ECONOMY AND FINANCE ISRAELI SOCIETY](#)

SUBJECT: ARAB-ISRAELI REACTIONS TO GOI'S NEGEV AND GALILEE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

REF: A. 04 TEL AVIV 02901

[B](#). 04 TEL AVIV 03085

[C](#). 04 TEL AVIV 03393

Classified By: Charge d'affaires Gene A. Cretz for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: In April Econoff met with several Israeli-Arab advocacy groups who expressed concern over the GOI's economic development plan for the Galilee and the Negev, which the GOI is pushing forward in tandem with disengagement. Citing historical disenfranchisement of Israeli Arabs in implementation of state economic policies, including home demolitions and forced relocation of Negev Bedouin, these groups expressed a lack of confidence in the GOI's ability to distribute land fairly. All GOI plans involving development in the Galilee and the Negev are a concern, according to our contacts, if they fail to include financial assistance and land allotments for the Arab minority groups living in those areas. Israeli-Arab groups collectively voiced plans to Econoff to examine closely government initiatives, and emphasized their concern that any USG assistance not be used to facilitate GOI expansion into existing Arab towns and villages in the Galilee and the Negev. END SUMMARY.

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ACAP: GOI Development Equals Loss of Israeli-Arab Land  
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[2](#). (C) On April 13, Dr. Hanna Swaid, chairman of The Arab Center for Alternative Planning (ACAP), described to Econoff the concerns of the Israeli-Arab population regarding the GOI's proposed economic development of the Negev and Galilee. Swaid said he believes the plan is primarily geared towards Jewish Israelis and is designed to displace Israeli Arabs. Regions within Israel in which there is a strong Israeli-Arab presence like the Galilee and the Bedouin settlements in the Negev will be negatively affected, he said. Swaid emphasized that he will publicly advocate that the U.S. not support the GOI in any initiative that could mean loss of land or further economic disenfranchisement for Israeli-Arab citizens. Swaid illustrated his concerns by citing a recent objection the ACAP filed with the Southern District Planning Commission in the Negev against a project to develop land between southern Gaza and Beersheva, for what Swaid believes are to be new residential communities for settlers evacuated from the northern West Bank. "Such a project holds nothing positive for Israeli Arabs, especially not for the Bedouin," he said.

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Bedouin Leadership: Any U.S. Assistance Will Hopefully Consider the Bedouin  
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[3](#). (C) On April 15, Econoff met with Faisal Sawalha of the NGO Regional Council for the Bedouin of the Unrecognized Villages (RCBUV). Sawalha highlighted Bedouin frustration over the GOI's systematic demolition of Bedouin homes in the unrecognized villages, adding that he does not know whether the demolitions are related to "the GOI's plan to find new homes for Israeli settlers, relocation of the Bedouin, or economic Negev development." He also complained that "no Bedouin or Arab is a member" of any of the GOI authorities responsible for Negev development, including committees within the National Security Council, the Ministry of the Interior, or the Israel Lands Authority. Sawalha said that while RCBUV has no specific strategy to counter the GOI's development initiatives, they have drawn up an "alternative development program" that includes recognition and expansion of existing Bedouin villages, and that they are looking into hiring outside professionals to examine any GOI Negev economic initiatives.

[4](#). (C) Dr. Thabet Abu Ras of the Shatil Foundation for Equality told Econoff that any USG assistance provided to the GOI for Negev development should include specific earmarks for improving the lot of the Bedouin. "Expelling the Bedouin" from their homes and ancestral lands in the Negev cannot be part of any economic development plan, Abu

Ras insisted. He said he will travel next month to the U.S. to lobby private organizations for Bedouin-specific assistance, and will meet with members of Congress to convince them that aid for Negev development must be conditional upon Israel providing economic support for the Bedouin localities. He will also encourage Congress to pressure Israel towards direct communication with Bedouin leadership.

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A Development Plan for Whom?  
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15. (C) On April 21, Adalah, an NGO which addresses the legal rights of the Arab minority in Israel, told Econoff that although Adalah is not aware of plan specifics, the organization is "not optimistic" that Israeli Arabs will benefit from any proposed economic initiative. Mrs. Suhad Bishara, who is an Adalah lawyer, cited an ever-widening social, political and economic gap between the Jewish and Israeli-Arab communities since the 1970's. She said the GOI has maintained a policy towards the Negev and Galilee of encouraging Jewish families to relocate to these regions to "balance out" heavily populated Arab centers. Adalah International Advocacy Director Rina Rosenberg noted that, in her view, the GOI's historical expansion plans have created "slums and ghettos" of Israeli-Arab towns. Turning to the GOI'S reported request for supplemental assistance from the USG, she explained that any money that is either public or private that goes to create segregated areas is morally wrong. Adalah will "challenge" unfair aspects of the plan through judicial organs, she said. On the question of benefits for the Israeli Arabs, from revenues generated by the development plan, Bishara said that this plan, like its predecessors would "exclude" Israeli Arabs. "We know what this plan is and its prospects for the next 20 or 30 years. This is not new," said Mrs. Bishara.

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Comment: What Development Means for Israeli-Arab NGO'S  
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16. (C) Econoff's meetings with Israeli-Arab NGO'S showed that these groups would like to see any U.S. assistance to the GOI for economic development in the Galilee and Negev include the Israeli Arab communities. As of now, however, there is no coordinated effort by these groups to address the GOI on its economic initiative.

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